

# PGA Championship

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

Kiawah Island, South Carolina, USA

The Ocean Course at Kiawah Island

## Jon Rahm

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody, to the 2021 PGA Championship here at the Ocean Course on Kiawah Island, South Carolina. We're pleased to be joined by world No. 3 Jon Rahm.

Jon, welcome to your fifth career PGA Championship. You were not here in 2012 when we last played here, but what have you come to know and learn about the Ocean Course and compare and contrast that with what you've experienced here a few days into our championship week?

JON RAHM: I would say even for the people that were here in 2012, it's hard to know what to expect. First of all, you're in a different time of year. I believe when they played back then, it was all Bermuda. Now it's overseed for the most part.

So it's obviously going to play a little different. I think a player told me they had some rain that week and it was very soft. It's incredibly firm out there right now, so the downwind holes, the ball bounces on the greens.

I think it's playing different. Now, when it comes to the golf course itself, it is nice to be familiar with the layout. It is really nice to be familiar with the wind. So if you've been here in the past and have played both east and west winds, I think you have a certain advantage on strategy on some holes.

I do know last time they moved a lot of tees around on some holes, so obviously that helps, as well.

You know, as a fan of Pete Dye golf courses, you kind of know what to expect. You get to the tee, you expect a fairway that you're not really going to see, deceiving off the tee, very deceiving to the eye on every single shot, much like TPC Sawgrass.

You have a shape off the tee and another shape coming into the green. It's a true ball striker's golf course. I enjoy the challenge, and I typically really enjoy Pete Dye golf courses, so I can't wait to play the front nine, which I haven't played yet, and get it going this week.

**Q. You've had a baby at home for a little over a month now. I guess you've had a chance to settle in, but how is that affecting your golf, your practice time and your preparation?**

JON RAHM: He's here now. He's six weeks. It definitely changes. You know, once he was born -- and even before -- I could feel priorities just starting to shift. This is a shift that happens in you from going from just regular 26 year old man to now being a father, right. There's a big shift in priorities, and that's what's going on.

Obviously I've still got to prioritize my career to provide for my family and do what I do, and I think that's been the hardest part when I'm home, because I wake up early, he's usually waking up and I hold him in my arms, and the last thing I want to is leave to go work out or leave to go putt or leave to go practice. Especially those early days. Going to Augusta was not easy three days after he was born. I guess you could still say it's the early days.

So I think just really -- especially in tournaments, I'm glad he came last week to know that I'm here to do a job, I'm here to practice, I'm here to play, and then once I'm done with my whole day, I get home now it's dad time, which at the same time is wonderful.

I get home and I forget about what's going on around me. I forgot that we are at Kiawah Island, I forget that we are at a major, and I forget what the mission is. It's also really refreshing for the mind.

The feeling of presence that I have when I'm with him is unique, so it can only be a good thing for me as a person and as a career.

**Q. Were you a good sleeper before and has that changed?**

JON RAHM: Well, I was a good sleeper. I still am, since my wife is breastfeeding and there's nothing I can do to help with that. But I talked to some players and other athletes, and I need my sleep in tournaments and rest, so we did hire somebody to help us at night, and recently we



started including a couple bottles at night so I can sleep through the night and Kelly can sleep through the night, as well.

She was being woken up. Sometimes I would sometimes I would wake up; sometimes I wouldn't, but it's all right for me so far.

But you gain a whole new appreciation for women, for what they go through in labor, for what they go through in the first month having to be awake every three hours and feed and everything. We definitely got the good end of the stick on this one.

**Q. It's not a great transition, but can I get your thoughts on the 17th hole?**

JON RAHM: Oh, here, the 17th? Well, I smoked a 2-iron yesterday to just carry it over the middle of the green over the water. Extremely difficult. That's all I can say. Any time you have 230 yards into the wind over water into a narrow target, it's just not easy.

I'm hoping we don't play it back there every day, otherwise it's going to be a challenging week. But it's a beautiful hole. It's very challenging.

It's a good thing, like I said, I enjoy Pete Dye golf courses, and the good thing you get with Pete Dye every time is that when you play you can see your limits for the most part, especially into the green. You see the tiles, you see the wood, I forget how you call it, and you see the line on the edge on the left side in the bunkers, so you have a clear target of where you need to hit it. There's no deceiving areas.

I think it's a wonderful hole. The whole golf course is a wonderful golf course. Again, it rewards good shots. If you don't hit a good one you're going to have to struggle for a par. Sometimes a bogey might be the best you can do.

**Q. You touched on playing different tees, and I know you guys have been advised to plan on playing some forward tees on certain holes depending on what the wind --**

JON RAHM: Seriously, I hope so, because yesterday from 14 on, I think the shortest iron I hit into a green was a 5-iron. I'm not usually the shortest hitter. I was playing with Zach Johnson, and I think he pulled a head cover on every single hole except the par-5, 16th, coming into the green.

For the sake of our sanity, I believe they're going to use a couple forward tees.

**Q. How do the forward tees change sight lines on a couple of holes because they're blind tee shots?**

JON RAHM: Yeah, a little bit. I feel like we had a pretty strong wind yesterday, so we were one tee box up. It kind of plays -- especially if you get the pictured yardage book where it tells you where the limits are -- it kind of plays as if it's in the back.

So if you have a 300-yard carry from the back and you're 280, 270, would you still play those lines? It's slightly different, obviously. You can maybe cover some things from the up tees, some bunkers and some dunes that you can't from the back. But it doesn't change that much overall. Maybe some of them were a little bit more diagonal, but I've only played the back nine; I'm playing the front nine right after this.

There weren't that many holes that made a huge difference shift. You just sometimes need to a little bit where you're aiming, but not too much, just because the winds are so strong.

**Q. You talked about the wind right there; try to define for us what the challenge is here with the wind.**

JON RAHM: It's one of the challenges. I mean, one of the things when you're right on the ocean and you have a humid place, you have a lot more dense air, right. So what a 10 miles an hour wind might be here is definitely going to be different than 10 miles an hour some places inland. You've got to account for that. You've got to club it, you've got to adjust to it.

Playing a couple practice rounds you might be able to get an idea of how much it's helping or hurting the ball, because some of the downwind holes the ball is going a very long ways. I think that's one of the challenges, right, being able to commit to the club that you have even though you might be hitting way longer clubs than you're used to on certain distances into the wind.

And again, I think that the biggest challenge when you have a place like this that's narrow targets and windy and narrow because it's windy, is just having a clear picture and full commitment on the shot. It's what you've got to do. You've got to pick a shot and be fully committed to it, otherwise it's going to be impossible to get around this golf course.

As a player, I think that's the biggest challenge. You have a lot of ideas in mind, a lot of options. Picking one and sticking to it and trying to execute it as best as possible.

**Q. You are one of the few golfers who were involved in the collaboration with the LPGA and Michelle Wie and the hoodie for golf. I'm curious how that came to be and how you see how important it is to have those type of cross-collaborations between the PGA and LPGA Tours?**

JON RAHM: To be honest, I'm not on social media all that much. Actually, I don't have it on any of the social media platforms on my phone. I was told about it right before I made the video and seemed like a no-brainer to support the cause. I was also told she pulled some strings and some of the NBA players are wearing that hoodie, as well.

If I believe there's something going on in many other sports, as well, right, you see the male side supporting the females. I've seen a lot of NBA players wearing the jerseys from the female players from that same town. I think I've seen a couple other times where I believe -- I forgot what it was more, Real Madrid soccer players supported the Real Madrid female soccer players in some instances.

It's all for the growth of the game, and I've said many times, if I can do a little bit of what some players in the past did for the game outside of playing, it would be an accomplished goal. If you can just grow the game, whether it's for males or females, I think it's mission accomplished, right, and that's what we're here for.

We're not only just players, we're ambassadors of the game, and I think Arnold, Jack, Tiger, Phil, Seve, they all did a great job in that outside the golf course, as well, and some of them are still doing it.

I take it as a bit of a duty to be able to grow the game, whether it's just for men or women, obviously trying to include as many people as possible.

**Q. Starting this week here and finishing in September, we have four big tournaments with golf courses by the water and with wind. So Kiawah this week, and then it's going to be Whistling Straits for the Ryder Cup. Do you embrace those conditions? Can you tell us a little bit about Kiawah and then Whistling Straits?**

JON RAHM: Well, yeah. Kiawah, we're going to have Torrey Pines, Royal St. George's, and Whistling Straits. One of them is not ocean water; it's going to be a little different. But yeah, you do get a similar idea of how it's going to play. For the most part, they'll probably all play difficult. That's all I can say.

Torrey Pines on a perfect sunny day with no wind, it's a very challenging golf course. When it's firm and fast and a

little wind, it's going to be even harder.

I think it's a good thing if you're one of those players who's known to be a good ball striker and likes the challenge, because I'm assuming they're all going to play similar.

Now, Whistling Straits is match play. That changes things a lot. It's all based on how they want to set it up, and when you don't have to count every single shot it's a little bit easier to be more aggressive and fire at some pins.

But in the other three cases, just got to play good golf. You've got to strike it well. You've got to put the ball in the right position and really keep in mind what the strategy is and what you want to be doing.

That's I think the key part. Just learning the golf course early and understanding how to play certain holes is going to be important.

**Q. Have you played Royal St. George's?**

JON RAHM: Actually I have. Not this year, but that was my first-ever links golf experience.

**Q. What was the occasion?**

JON RAHM: British Boys. Well, actually we played at Royal Cinque Ports. That was my first-ever links experience, and that was the day before we were allowed to go practice at St. George's.

I played with my dad. Yeah, I played the British Boys and I made it to I think top 16 I made it to. That was my first-ever sighting, and I think I was 14.

**Q. You talk about the importance of playing for the flag at the Olympics. How does that compare with playing for representing Spain in a Ryder Cup? How do you differentiate --**

JON RAHM: It's very similar. It is very similar, very similar feeling playing for something more than yourself. It's always a great feeling. Like I said earlier, I've had the pleasure of being able to win gold medals in European Championships and championships for Spain as an amateur, and I would love nothing more than to be able to do it as a professional, as well.

Especially because up until four years ago that wasn't an option, so to be called an Olympian, it's a very unique feeling. A very select group of people can say they've been Olympians throughout their life, and if you can get a medal, that would be amazing.

**Q. What kind of pressure would there be to win a medal compared with doing something individually?**

JON RAHM: Well, you're still playing individually, right, so I can't say it would be different. Still the same game, still stroke play. It's not like it's a different format.

But I can imagine the feeling afterwards, and I can only imagine it would be very different. That's where I think the difference would be.

**Q. Can you imagine what kind of pressure Sungjae Im would feel, that if he doesn't win a medal he goes into the military?**

JON RAHM: Wait, seriously? I'm sorry I'm laughing, but is that serious?

**Q. Yeah, that's the one way to be exempt from mandatory military service is to win a medal at the Olympics.**

JON RAHM: Well, I would say if we're fighting for fourth and third place, I'm open for bribing if he needs me to make a three-putt on the last hole. We can always talk about it. I like Korean food. We can always talk about it.

That is very different, right, because he's going to be playing for -- just to be able to have a chance to be -- fulfilling his dream, which is play golf on the PGA TOUR. It's not easy to do, especially coming from a different country. I feel for him that those are the two choices, either win a medal or go military service, because even if you end up in the nicest branch of the military it's still one or two years he can't play golf. That's a big setback.

Again, I understand that's the rules and he probably knew it coming into it, but he wouldn't be the first player to have to leave to go back to Korea to do it, right. Sang Moon Bae had to do it. I feel for him.

Yeah, Sang Moon didn't have a chance to win an Olympic medal, did he?

**Q. No. They also had the Asian Games. That was for amateurs. If you had won a gold medal at the Asian Games you could've been exempt.**

JON RAHM: I think they could include a PGA TOUR event in that.

**Q. No, because when he was close at the Masters in November, they thought, Oh, green jacket would get you out.**

JON RAHM: They could include a PGA TOUR event. It's not like it's easy to win a PGA TOUR event.

**Q. Tell that to the Koreans. Tell that to the government.**

JON RAHM: They're probably not thinking about it the same way I am right now. But yeah, I feel for him. I can't imagine what he's going through. You'll have to ask him. I can't imagine.

Again, it would be a big setback for his golf career, but it is also part of being in that country, right, so he probably knew it ahead of him.

THE MODERATOR: Jon, thank you. Have a great week and we hope to see you again soon.

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